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Redefining and Elderly Caregiving in the 21st Century China and Poland

The family has been the central unit of the Chinese social organization for thousands of years. Traditionally, elders were looked after by the young with minimal state interventions. The Confucian filial piety that bound children to obey and serve their parents was treated as the highest of all virtues (Cheng & Chan, 2006, p. 262). However, it is a fact that recently the Confucian idea of filial piety has received lots of criticism, particularly from anthropologists and sociologists, who focus on the area of "family studies" (Slote & de Vos, 1998). Apart from a few exceptions, commentators have been critical of the idea to such an extent that one might wonder if it still has any relevance for the twenty-first century Chinese society. Nevertheless, as in the case of most concepts and ideas in ancient Chinese philosophy, this is all a matter of interpretation.

Polish families used to be traditionally large, with elders representing an important link with the past. The practice of respecting elders has its roots in the Christian culture. As observed by Robert Bellah (1970), "it is on the basis of authority derived from God that parents and rulers should be reverenced". It is not due to religious observance, however, that the value of deference to elders is significant to the majority of Poles. Older people are perceived in the Polish culture as the embodiment of wisdom and virtues, and as such, they are to be followed (Kukołowicz, 2002).

Nowadays, in the face of significant changes both of the mentioned countries have been undergoing since the 80s of 20th century – through reforms, marketization, and social phenomena like migration, and the ageing processes – a question arises about the impact of these changes on the pattern and structure of social relationships. A relevant indicator of social change in the Chinese society is located between the sense and

content of the obligation that individuals feel to others, especially in the context of the relationship with parents. As noted by Mao and Chi (2011), there is a plethora of studies on filial piety which focuses on its factorial constituents (e.g. Sung, 1998), its role in intergenerational bonds and support exchange (e.g. Chow, 2001; Miller, 2004; Zhan, 2004), and its influence on parental caregiving (e.g. Chappel & Kusch, 2007; Hseuh, 2001; Lai, 2010) as well as presumptions of filial piety cultivated by parents and the implementation of this piety by their grownup children (Cheng & Chan, 2006; Philips et al., 2008). While the problem of ageing is frequently studied in the context of the Polish society, the issue of filial piety is occasionally mentioned in primary sources. It is dominated by studies of caregiving strategies (Bień & Wojszel, 2007), the position of elderly within the family and society (Czekanowski, 2011) and the determinants of life satisfaction among the elderly (Angelini et al., 2012).

The present paper discusses the way in which the concept of filial piety, which is deeply rooted in the Chinese and Polish cultures, is adapted to the ever-changing contemporary reality. Apart from analyzing the role of elders and elderly care, it principally covers the actions of the Communist Party of China (CPC) promoting its persistence. As a case study, the paper also examines the content of selected social campaigns created to promote and reshape the idea of filial piety.

Elders and the concept of filial piety in China

At the moment, China is still a relatively young country, with the average age of around 30; however, it is aging at an unprecedented rate and on an extraordinary scale due to the one-child policy (implemented between 1979 and 2015), the improvement of life expectancy and the large base population. In 2013, the average life expectancy at birth for the Chinese reached 75 years and the total fertility rate dropped to 1.5, well below the replacement level (United Nations Population Division, 2013). While in 1990 China had 67 million people aged 65 and older, this number climbed to 88 million in 2000, and then to 114 million in 2010. It is projected to reach 235 million (about 16.2% of the entire population) by 2030 (ibid.). At this rate in 2030 the country will have more elderly dependents than children, whereas in most of the other developing countries this relation will be opposite. In the early 1980s Wu Cangping, an academic at the Population and Development Resarch Centre at the Renmin University in Beijing, predicted a problem of "getting old before getting rich" in People's Republic of China (*The Economist*, 2009). Since then, however,

China has become a lot richer (with an income per person of about $7500 at ppp) and Chinese demographers might now argue that the phrase should be changed to "getting old while getting rich" (ibid.).

The socioeconomic changes in the country are shifting the condition and nature of familial and individual values. For centuries, family has played a central role in the elderly care in China. In addition, the Chinese Constitution and a series of laws were passed in the late 1990s that stipulate that family members have the primary responsibility to take care of their elderly parents, including arranging suitable housing (Zhang et al., 2004). These traditions are also reflected in many language idioms, for example: *happiness for the elderly comes from their children, who please them by living with them* (Chin. *cheng huan xi xia*), *having three generations living together under one roof* (Chin. *san dai tong tang*), and *insisting that harmony in the family is the basis for success in any undertaking* (Chin. *jia he wan shi xing*) (Chyi & Mao, 2012). Furthermore, care for the elder within a family also constitutes a cultural expectation based on the Confucian tradition of respect for age and experience.

Traditional cultural patterns in terms of norms, roles, and relationships have been deeply embedded in the Chinese society for millennia. With respect to family relations, sentiments and practices where associated in particular with *xiao* (filial piety), which included respect, obedience, and the obligation to care for elderly parents and respond to their needs (Deutsch, 2006). Attitudes and behaviors towards parents to ensure their well-being have contributed to keeping different generations connected and have led to an inherent sense of a child's obligation to support their parents in the ever-changing Chinese context (Mao & Chi, 2011). The classic of filial piety, Confucius (551–447 B.C.) said: "In serving his parents, a filial son revers them in daily life, he makes them happy while he nourishes them; he takes anxious care of them in sickness, he shows great sorrow over their death; and he sacrifices himself to them with solemnity" (Chai & Chai, 1965, p. 331). Adult children are also encouraged to avoid travelling far away from their parents (ibid.). Family obligation as filial piety was institutionalized in imperial China in a moral culture based on the Confucian philosophy and sustained by laws which preferred seniors (Xu, 2001).

During the Mao era and specifically throughout the Cultural Revolution, a lot of efforts were made to uproot these traditional cultural values. Extensive and deliberate campaigns were launched to transpose loyalty from traditional kinship to the Communist Party and its apparatus. Confucian ideology was heavily criticized and the Maoist thought relating to class struggle, revolution and self-sacrifice to build a perfect collectivist society was strongly supported. The rectifications campaigns of 1950s

that were continued until 1970s resulted in the loss of the traditional notion of filial piety on both the ideological and institutional ground (Yan, 2009, p. 172). Still, despite the fact that the customary legitimation of this virtue was unsettled, family obligation itself was left unharmed. Even though clashes between the family and the Party resulted in favoring the Party, the Party still emphasized the enduring significance of family associations for individual welfare in the newly-reformed China (Qi, 2014, p. 146).

In spite of the enormous changes that have taken place in China since the beginning of the 1980s, it is remarkable that the importance of the Confucian notion of *xiao* ersists to this day. Even though the ethos and practice of familial obligations play a major role in determining the behavior of both parents and children, the meaning of *xiao* has been reinterpreted in various ways. What is more, the institutional basis of the familial obligation in present-day China represents the interest of the party-state and the context-based motives for self-preservation of its citizens (Qi, 2015). The familial obligation and filial piety were weakened during the reform period. Those who support the individualization factor point to the cultural acceptance of an ideological shift from self-sacrifice in the name of kinship or collective needs to self-realization and self-interest (Yan, 2009). The psychological mechanism hidden behind filial piety may be understood in different terms. Ho (1994) regards the character of filial piety as authoritarian and believes it has influence on the absolute parental authority over children. Contrary to this, Yang (1996) views filial piety through a society-oriented lens which has the reciprocity function of the reification of the concept of filial piety and which treats the relationship to which this term refers as grounded in politico-legal, social and normative frameworks in which an individual creates innovative strategies (Qi, 2014, p. 145).

Elders and the concept of filial piety in Poland

The demographic situation in Poland has recently caused a lot of concerns, which were not only expressed by researchers working in social sciences but also politicians. This is due to the fact that Poland is ageing very fast. According to the World Bank statistics, the average age in Poland in 2012 was 38 years, and this number will grow to 51 in 2050 (Devictor, 2012). Low birth rates and emigration are the two main factors which lead to Poland's population decline. In 2013, the average life expectancy of Poles reached 76 years – which is a similar figure than the one

for China. At the same time, the total fertility rate dropped dramatically to 1.3 (United Nations Population Division, 2013). At the same time, the Polish Central Statistical Office estimates that the number of long-term Polish emigrants has risen from 0.7 million in 2002 to the peak number of almost 2.3 million in 2007, and currently oscillates around 2 million (Central Statistical Office, 2013). The facts mentioned above are important not only when it comes to the quantitative population analysis, but also when examining the strains within Polish family structure as well as the position of the elderly and the state of elderly care.

Traditionally, Polish families consisted of three generations: children, parents, and grandparents living under one roof – which was similar to a Chinese family. The customary respect for the elderly, as is still seen today, takes the most varied forms – from the esteem-ridden nickname "Grandpa" (Dziadek) has (it appears next to the names of prominent persons, such as Kazimierz Lisiecki, a teacher, creator of educational centers, and marshal Józef Piłsudski) (Kukołowicz, 2002), to the special position of the eldest in the given chamber in the Parliament.

However, the attitude towards the elderly is also changing. First of all, they are frequently no longer the residents of the same household as their grown-up children. Still, if both of the parents work, grandparents are the ones who take care of their grandchildren. The life expectancy is increasing, although this also means that other household members have to provide long-term assistance for increasingly disabled and dependent elders. This leads to the feeling of solitude and often discrimination among the elder.

The issue of the perception of old age, ageing and discrimination in Poland was evaluated in a public survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center (Pol. Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej) in 1998, 2000, 2007, 2009, and 2010. It was also studied in various scientific contributions (Szukalski, 2004; Szatur-Jaworska, 2000). However, it was noted by Piotr Szukalski (2008), that those studies lacked a wider perspective. The results of the surveys mentioned above point to the fact that respectful attitude towards elders prevails in family (79%) and neighborhood (79%). The lowest level of respect was towards elders in medical (39%) and governmental institutions (32%) or on the street (25%). One per four respondents reported a feeling of indifference and lack of preoccupation in their living environment (Prokop & Ożegalska-Łukasik, 2014). Still, 87% of the Poles who were questioned believed that elders were indispensable to the society; conversely, only 9% treated them as a burden to others (Public Opinion Research Center, 2009). It is worth mentioning that the majority of elders lean toward the second opinion. It is also a widely held judgment among old-aged respondents that they

experience discrimination in the work place and face serious difficulties in finding a job due to old age (The Academy for the Development of Philanthropy, 2007).

The role of the CPC in the redefinition of filial piety

Within its contemporary meaning, filial piety refers to unconditional, material and emotional support for parents. It is expressed by caring for parents and showing respect, obedience, providing them with financial support, greeting and pleasing them (Ng, 2002). It provides, therefore, not only financial support and instrumental care, two widely recognized forms of filial obligation and responsibility, but also the filial virtues specified by Confucianism: 1) taking care of parents, 2) being obedient, 3) showing love and respect, 4) being courteous, 5) concealing or ignoring parents' faults, 6) mourning parents' death in persistent, spontaneous, cohesive, and mutually consented ways (Lin, 1992). The latter components, once associated with the practice of rituals and submission to parental authority, are no longer elements of the contemporary conception of filial piety (Cheng & Chan, 2006; Cheung, Lee, & Chan, 1994; Ho, 1996).

As it has already been indicated, China has a long standing tradition of caring for the elderly; this care should be the sole responsibility of family members – never that of the government or society in general. Furthermore, China has never had a wide-ranging welfare infrastructure, and there is practically no comprehensive system that would provide care for the elderly in today's mainland China. It is relevant to note that neither the Communist Revolution nor the post-1978 reforms resulted in any significant breakaway from this tradition (Ikels, 1993, p. 307). At the beginning of the new millennium, care homes managed by the state and collective units provided beds for only 0.8% of the target population (Wong, 2008, p. 90). The number of beds per 1 000 senior citizens was growing steadily (as shown in Figure 1) and reached over 21 beds in 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013). This level of enrollment is still much lower than the 50–70 score observed in the developing countries. It should be noted, however that, as demonstrated in Figure 1, in 2010 China surpassed Poland in the number of beds in elderly care institutions for the first time (since 2005, Poland has maintained a steady figure of 17 beds per 1000 elders).

At the same time, only the childless Chinese elderly are allowed to benefit from the state-provided system of "five guarantees", which include: food, housing, clothing and health care as well as burial costs. All of those are provided at the lowest possible subsistence level (Thogarsen

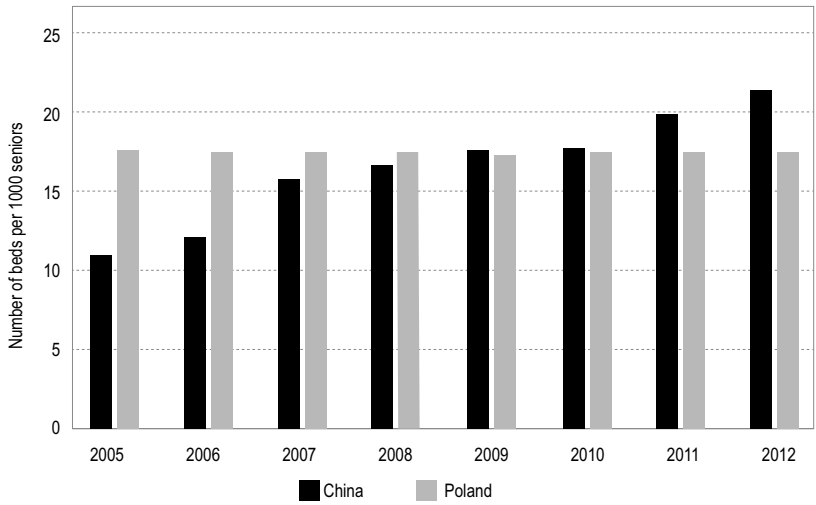

Figure 1. Number of beds in Chinese and Polish elderly care institutions per 1,000 senior/over 65 years old/citizens

Source: Author's own work based on National Bureau of Statistics, 2013, and OECD, 2016.

& Ni, 2008, p. 13). The Chinese government has persistently strengthened the emphasis on the responsibility of family members for the care for the elderly through media campaigns and legal means as a substitute for accepting the responsibility of the welfare program.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has recently been promoting filial piety with a vast range of actions. Some of them will be listed and covered below:

I. TV programs (e.g. Filial Piety Awards)
II. Modern Filial Piety Culture Museum
III. Education through documents (e.g. "Standard for Being a Good Pupil and Child")
IV. Creating a legal obligation of filial piety:
    a) "Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People" includes a chapter entitled "Maintenance and Support by Families" with specific instructions
    b) "Family Support Agreement"
V. Creating business opportunities for entrepreneurs to invest in elderly-related endeavors
VI. Ordering social campaigns aired on TV and distributed through the Internet (Youku, Weibo).

TV programs and award ceremonies such as the Chinese Filial Piety Awards Ceremony or the annual Chinese Filial Piety Writing Contest, attempt to emphasize the importance of filial devotion and celebrate its

outstanding forms of expression. The Filial Piety Awards, just like other competitions, was set up to promote the virtue of filial piety through examples from real life.

Another initiative – Modern Filial Piety Culture Museum – was established in 2014 for more than one million US dollars and it constitutes part of government-backed efforts to "pass on the value" – as the banner over the entrance exhorts. It uses traditional Chinese architecture as a backdrop and showcases stories of filial piety by detailing narratives in which children sacrificed the most important things in life to honor and respect their parents.

Another important component of the governmental promotion of filial piety is through education and fostering of a collection of Confucian sayings which emphasize filial piety. President Xi Jinping is urging officials to read *Standards for being a Good Pupil and Child* (*Di Zi Gui*) written in Qing Dynasty by Li Yuxiu. Filial piety is also taught at school at different levels of education.

Special consideration should be also given to the legal aspects of filial piety in contemporary China. By mid-1980s, in order to ensure parental support, the Family Support Agreement (*jiating shanyang xieyi*) was introduced. Until the end of 2005, FSA has been signed by more than 13 million rural families across China and is now working its way into cities. FSA is a voluntary contract between parents and adult children giving formal grounds to parental care (Chou, 2010). Although the FSA is a voluntary contract, supporting one's parents is also mandated by law. According to Article 49 of the Constitution, "Parents have the duty to rear and educate their children who are minors; and children who have come of age have the duty to support and assist parents" (National People's Congress of The People's Republic of China, 1982). Articles 20, 21, and 22 of the Marriage Law extend the duty of mutual support from parents and children through adoptive, foster or stepparents and children, all the way to grandparents and grandchildren (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2001).

The assertion of filiality in other forms at the level of government was also notable in 2012 and 2013, when China's National Bureau of Senior Affairs (*Quanguo Laoling Ban*) released the New 24 Filial Exemplars. Another legal document, entitled "Protection of the Rights and Interest of Elderly People", includes nine clauses that lay down the duties of children and their obligation to tend to the "spiritual needs of the elderly". In order to provide additional motivation, some regional representations of the CPC (e.g. in Hunan) also indicated that applicants who did not provide sufficient care for their parents would be ineligible for party membership (Zhuang, 2012).

As mentioned above, two major forms of old-age support exist in China today. The more significant informal support is mainly provided by adult children and their spouses. The formal support is offered by public social welfare programs and public or enterprise-based pension systems (Pei & Pillai, 1999). However, according to a document issued on November 24, 2014 by the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, foreign investors are also very strongly encouraged to run commercial elderly care facilities, including nursing homes and recreation centers.

The last of the discussed types of measures taken by the CPC are social campaigns. They will be covered more broadly, as they constitute some of the most effective tools of reshaping the concept of filial piety.

Case study: Social campaigns as a means of filial piety's reinforcement in China

This research has conceptualized the social campaign as a specific element of the public sphere in contemporary societies world-wide. For the purposes of the research, social campaigns were conceptualized as social acts aimed at introducing a social change to broad social groups. Since social campaigns exert influence mostly by visual means, visual materials used in filial piety campaigns were operationalized as communicative tools employed in the process of the social change. The aim of this part of the research was to examine the content of the campaigns promoting the idea of filial piety which were ordered by one of the main actors who shaped the actual definition of filial piety. We wanted to explore social measures in the area of changing the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of social attitudes towards elders.

In the study, the analysis of visual materials was concentrated on their content. The objective was to answer the main research questions: What kind of message do those campaigns try to deliver? What specific elements can be identified in Chinese campaigns? How do social campaigns try to shape the concept of filial piety?

Visual materials from 15 filial piety campaigns were examined within the study. The materials were collected from Internet resources, portals offering collections of international social campaigns and local Internet resources. The majority of the visual materials analyzed herein were obtained from Youku. The materials were transcribed, encoded and analyzed with a help of the qualitative analysis program MaxQda, according to the above-described schema.

Most of the analyzed visual materials gathered for this exploratory research were produced by renowned Western agencies, such as Saatchi & Saatchi, and were commissioned by public institutions. One of the most successful examples of social campaigns promoting filial piety was a triptych called "The Aged Care", produced by Saatchi & Saatchi. It consists of three separate social ads concentrated on different aspects of elderly care. The success of those campaigns, aired in CCTV, is indisputable. The campaigns were launched on January 19th 2013 and were very frequently broadcast during Chinese New Year and later on throughout the year on 20 CCTV channels at different times of the day. The campaigns generated 1 million views on the first day of airing and a set of social media were abuzz with comments on the social network exceeding 2 million in 2 weeks. The films reached more than 500 million views. The main message was to raise awareness of the importance of connecting with relatives and loved ones in these increasingly selfish times. Each campaign of this triptych touched upon a different problem potentially experienced by the elderly. "Father's Lie" tells a story of an old man lying to his daughter to conceal the real difficulties he is experiencing in his old age. The second one, entitled "Take away", shows the story of a father suffering from Alzheimer's who forgets basic everyday things, but remembers the eating habits of his son. The advertisement is concluded with a meaningful tagline: "He's forgotten a lot of things. But he'll never forget he loves you". The third one of this series, called "Mum's wait", draws the viewers' attention to the problem of leaving parents due to economic migration. It starts with a picture of a young mother and her son who are transforming through ages, with the continuous thread of eternal and unconditional love linking each other.

The Confucian responsibility for ill parents is stressed in the campaign "Let love go back home". A father who was always seen as a hero by his son is turned into a person detached from reality due to Alzheimer's disease. The adult son is trying to face the problem of losing contact with his father, shows his involvement by trying to find his father who lost his way back home. This social advertisement ends with the message: "Pay attention to patients with Alzheimer's. Take care of and love your parents. Let love go back home". Another ad bringing tears to the eyes of many and viewed millions of times presents an image of a dying mother. "Lunch" – as it is entitled – mostly revolves around cooking and eating food – the de facto shared language of most Chinese families.

Another campaign called "63 years after the Reunion" highlights generational connections as an elderly man pays his respects to his late mother. The old man living in Taiwan is coming to visit his brother and other family members who live in mainland China for Chinese New Year.

After finishing a meal together, he is having some personal moments with a photograph of his mother.

The distinctive feature of most Chinese campaigns analyzed within the framework of this paper revolve around the challenges of facing the suffering of elderly people, induced by loneliness, health problems or a difficult financial situation, and especially – around the way they cope with their old age. At the same time, it is interesting that those stories are mostly told from the perspective of the third person (however, we can get a feeling that a story is presented by someone who sees situation of the elderly person from a wider perspective and with greater objectivity). A person dealing with old age is usually shown in a context of his/her relations with others, as in campaigns concerning Alzheimer's disease ("Let love go back home" or "Take away").

Elderly life within the studied campaigns is usually presented in a descriptive way, sometimes with the use of metaphors. For instance, the campaign "Let love go back home" shows a bicycle as a symbol of an elderly father's lost abilities, and the campaign "Take away" *jiaozi* (Chinese dumpling) uses the symbol of a son's favorite food – the last thing his father clearly remembers. Another characteristic motif which appears in some campaigns is related to internal migration and its consequences – mainly leaving the family home and ageing parents. They emphasize the necessity of visiting parents at least during Chinese New Year.

In general, the described campaigns convey messages in an emotional way. It is not surprising that Chinese campaigns typically promote social support – especially from loved ones – and acceptance as the anticipated social norms. The main message we can identify in the analyzed visual materials was a call for emotional support for parents. Finally, it is also stressed that attachment to home and family constitutes a moral obligation. What should also be noted is that none of the analyzed campaigns expressed a direct suggestion for providing help in an economic sense. Another characteristic feature of the studied campaigns is the fact that all of them consist of long video sequences and in order to understand the final message one should watch them from the beginning. Finally, a very interesting reference which could be distinguished was the cultural practice of eating together, as in the campaigns "Lunch", "63 years after reunion", and "Take away".

Conclusion

Filial piety understood as a cultural value is strictly codified and supported by legal sanctions, which results in the creation of limitations to actions available to people and in building a scheme for the interpretation of other people's actions (Abramson, 2012, p. 173). The structural foundation of familial obligation in contemporary China and Poland is a continued dependence on family members when caring for the elderly due to the absence of adequate state-provided welfare. Nevertheless, the emotional commitment of mature children today, especially those living far away from their hometown, might be perceived more in the context of their private relations than their relations with parents. The shift in the primary emotional responsibility does not mean that mature children feel that they have no obligation to care for their parents' well-being, be it physical or emotional. Familial obligation, particularly in terms of material support, will continue to play an important role in the Chinese and Polish societies in the future. But it does not mean that past structures and patterns of familial obligation and filial piety will remain unchanged. The question which should arise is not whether adult children would sacrifice themselves for their parents but rather what form of support adult children would feel obliged to provide to their elderly parents and on what basis. Familial obligation and filial piety remain the core elements of the culture system, which interacts with the politico-legal and social context in which it operates. In China, the CPC undoubtedly plays a major role in creating a new image of filial piety conforming to the contemporary Chinese reality. It holds in its hands a range of tools, such as the legal system and incentives both for caregivers and investors willing to contribute to the elderly care system. Finally, measures taken by the media, including social campaigns distributed on television and on the Internet, represent an effective means of reshaping the concept of filial piety. As observed herein, recent social campaigns in this area seem to be professionally prepared, with a significant involvement of renowned media agencies. Consequently, they attract a lot of attention and appear to fulfill their goals. The content of the campaigns refers to culturally meaningful motifs like family, food, Chinese New Year Eve, dedication of parents to children etc. The key to their success is that they build up on emotions and refer to daily life of a Chinese adult living in contemporary China.

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